

THE
ELOQUENCE
OF
THE PULPIT.

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THE
ELOQUENCE
OF THE
PULPIT,
AN
ORDINATION SERMON;

TO WHICH IS ADDED

A

CHARGE.

BY

JAMES FORDYCE
MINISTER AT BRECHIN.

ABERDEEN:

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MDCCLII.



N. B The following Sermon, preached at the Ordination of the Revd. Mr. David Fergusson Minister at Farnwell, July 25th 1751, is published at the desire of the Ministers who heard it.



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ACTS xviii. 24.

AND A CERTAIN JEW, NAMED APPOLLOS, BORN AT ALEXANDRIA, AN ELOQUENT MAN, AND MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES, CAME TO EPHE-SUS.

FROM the character that is given here of this primitive minister, I will take occasion to enquire at this time ; what are the principal ingredients of that sacred eloquence which every minister ought to study. Though the subject be somewhat uncommon for a sermon, I hope it will not be altogether unseasonable at present. And though I am sensible it is a difficult one, yet the confidence I have in your candour, my reverend fathers and brethren, emboldens me to attempt it. What I fear most in this undertaking, is lest it should be thought, that the notion I am to offer, of the eloquence in question, is too much raised, and that how easy soever it may be to conceive, it will be impossible to reduce it fully to practice. It must be owned, indeed, that an accomplished oratour of any kind is exceeding rare. Such a concurrence of noble talents is necessary for so fine a production as falls not often to the share of humanity, and is the privilege only of a few favoured and select spirits. Knowing this, we are apt to be disheartened ; and, from a secret consciousness of our own incapacity for excelling, to satisfy ourselves with too defective a standard. Or else not thinking perhaps of the matter, certainly not thinking justly, we are apt to be indifferent ; and, from a real want of taste, to satisfy ourselves with the common stand-

ard which is sometimes exceeding low, and always too defective. What is the effect of this? To encourage sloth, to hinder every generous effort, and prevent our performing any thing great or excellent of the kind. But it will be acknowledged on reflexion, that in any art whatever it is of use in general, to propose to ourselves the most compleat model we can either find or imagine; which, by continually flaming in our eye, may fire us with an ambition of resembling it; and though we should never arrive at a perfect resemblance, yet by strenuous and repeated endeavours we shall at least make very near approaches to it. When we come to speak, however, of the particular talents requisite for any profession, it may be necessary for the most part to hold a middle way, between insisting on such as are too high, and admitting of such as are too low. If upon the subject before us, we should be led to mention some qualifications which may appear to be of the former kind, what hath been now suggested must be our apology. But it is hoped, that most of those we shall have occasion to speak of, will be found such as may be demanded very reasonably, and by proper means very possibly attained, where a foundation is laid for them in the original frame.

As to the enquiry now proposed, what is mainly necessary to constitute an eloquent minister or preacher, I would say for answer, that a man must be possessed of good talents, both natural and acquired; that he must direct these to the great end of preaching; and that he must be animated in this undertak-

ing, by a sublime spirit of religion. After I have illustrated these three points, I will conclude with some motives to the study of christian oratory. — And may God assist and prosper the attempt.

I. THE first point is to shew, that to be an eloquent minister or preacher, a man must be possessed of good talents, both natural and acquired.

I. OF good natural talents. I need not tell you, my brethren in the ministry, what high encomiums have been made on eloquence in general, by all who have treated of that art, and what an happy genius they all require in those who would apply to it with success. Indeed the least reflexion may convince us, that the art of instructing and persuading mankind, must necessarily be one of the noblest, if not the noblest of which the human mind is capable, and must require, at the lowest reckoning, a considerable strength and variety of parts. Will not this hold peculiarly true, when the aim is to instruct men in the most spiritual and exalted truths, such as are most remote from their external senses and daily pursuits? Will it not hold peculiarly true, when the aim is to persuade them, to those dutys, to which their corrupted natures and evil habits are most repugnant? Or shall that be deemed a slight or easy art, the professed design of which is no less than this, to bring mankind to the knowledge and practice of true religion in spite of all the opposition arising to both, from erroneous opinions and depraved dispositions, frequently cherished by a bad education, and always strengthened by the united temptations

of the world, the devil and the flesh ? Can it be thought, that such a design is to be managed to purpose, without much address ? Or is this address to be acquired without natural abilities, or with poor ones ? Is that, which is the highest, at least the worthiest, exertion of human genius, to be attempted where there is no genius ? Are there peculiar abilities required for excelling in every other profession of importance ? And does this divine profession require none at all, or such only, as are lame and contemptible ? What then ! Are the blind, the halt, and the maimed, in this sense alone, to be offered to the Lord in sacrifice ? Is the temple of God to be made a sanctuary for weakness, ignorance, and insignificance ? Is not this a principal source of that contempt of the clergy, so loudly and so long complained of ? And does it not bear a very unfavourable aspect on the interests of religion and society ? Were it not earnestly to be wished for the sake of both, as well as for men's own credit, and that of the order, that such as are born with mean capacities, would be advised not to engage in a profession for which they are apparently so very unfit, which some of the most able men have not thought of but with trembling, nor undertaken but by a kind of force ; and with regard to the difficulties of which, even an apostle, nay the greatest of the apostles finds reason to cry out, ‘ Who is sufficient for these things. ?’ 2 Cor. ii. 16.

I will not enter here into a full detail of the original endowments necessary to our pulpit-oratour. I

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will just touch on some of them. First of all there is a sound and clear understanding. This wants no proof. To go about to prove the necessity of such an understanding, would be to offer an affront to your's. Then there is a warm and lively imagination, which will open to a man the largest and fairest fields of thought, and qualify him to exhibit to others in the most advantageous manner, the various objects both of the visible and invisible worlds, by perpetually presenting them to his own mind in the most striking and beautiful points of light, and producing in him an uncommon sensibility of their most delicate and exquisite impressions. There is likewise a retentive memory ; which may serve as a storehouse to treasure up the different sets of ideas, and pieces of knowledge, he any how acquires, relative to his profession ; and from whence he may bring them forth readily, both in composing and delivering his sermons ; ' like to a man that is an householder,' (to use our master's own comparison) ' who bringeth forth out of his treasure, things new and old.' Mat. xiii. 52. Once more : there is what may be called a natural elocution, or original gift of utterance ; which with the assistance of some practice, and the knowledge of the language, will enable him to express himself freely and fluently, upon any subject he understands.

Now, though study, exercise, and the blessing of God, will, no doubt, greatly improve these talents, where they are ; yet I see no reason to think they will produce them where they are not, and but little

reason to think they will sufficiently supply the want of them. I do not say, that a man in that case cannot be at all an useful, but this I presume to say, that he cannot be truly an eloquent preacher. What has been said of poets, may be applyed in this sense to preachers : they must be born such.

2. I said that good acquired talents were also requisite ; such, for instance, as the knowlege of religion at large, the knowlege of the scriptures in particular, the knowlege of men, and a competent knowlege of books, of such at least as are of the greatest use and value.

1. WITH regard to the knowlege of religion at large : the indispensable necessity of this, is self-evident. To undertake to teach any science whatever without understanding it thoroughly ; it is hard to say whether it be most absurd or impudent. The science of religion, taken in it's widest view, is an extensive thing. It comprehends under it the knowlege of moral dutys, of natural theology, and of revealed truths ; as being all essential, constituent parts of the general body of divinity ; all composing one grand, harmonious system ; and all mutually borrowing and lending light, strength, and beauty to one another. As God hath originally joined these things together, his servants are certainly never to put them asunder. Every one of them must suffer by such an unnatural divorce. Therefore our preacher is not only to study the distinct nature and respective evidence of each, but to trace the connexions and coherence of all together ; dwelling often on these

views, till they become quite familiar to his mind, and he be in condition to discourse of them with that readiness and command, which are the result of being master of any subject.

BUT it is necessary to add here, that our evangelical orator must be acquainted, in a very particular manner, with the constitution of the gospel-covenant, or that great mystery of godliness, into which those students of the angelic order are said to desire to look, bending as it were from their thrones to pry into it. This, you my brethren, know well, is the principal theme, and ultimate scope of the gospel; the whole structure of which is properly the unfolding of this mystery, or the execution of that stupendous plan of salvation, which was conceived in the breast of God from everlasting, laid open in the fulness of time, executed in part by the son of God formerly upon earth, and is carrying on by him now in heaven, as master-builder, appointed by the father of all, to conduct and finish the great design. Now as the gospel was intended thus to exhibit to us its different prospects or particular openings; it must follow of necessity, that a preacher of the gospel should apply himself chiefly to survey this plan, to mark its several parts and proportions as far as they are to be seen at present, and to observe the skill with which the whole is contrived, and the end for which it is adapted; determining, with the apostle Paul, ‘to know nothing,’ that is nothing comparatively speaking, ‘save Christ and him crucified.” 1 Cor. ii. 2.

2. As it is the scriptures that testify concerning Christ, and contain the words of eternal life, so our preacher ought undoubtedly to have an accurate and comprehensive knowlege of those inspired writings ; not that merely which is critical and curious, though that too be useful in it's way ; but principally such a knowlege of them, as may render him ‘ a scribe
‘ well instructed in the mysterys of the kingdom,²
and qualify him to unfold and inculcate these, by the assistance of lights and arguments borrowed from the writings themselves ; to use them, in fine, as the great ‘ weapon of his warfare, mighty through
‘ God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting
‘ down imaginations, and every high thing that
‘ exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and
‘ bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.’ 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

In citing scripture, he is not, I conceive, to load his sermons with an indigested heap of quotations from thence ; some of them plainly unnecessary, others possibly misapplied. But for the proof or illustration of any important point, he is to adduce one, or two, or sometimes more well-chosen passages, either immediately relating to it, or easily applicable by way of analogy. These it may sometimes be sufficient barely to mention. But when a particular stress is intended to be laid upon them, it may then be proper to read them along with the people, and by briefly descanting on them, to point out their emphasis and application.

It were impossible to enumerate here all the dif-

ferent ways in which the sacred writings may be applied by a preacher ; they contain such a number and variety of surprising and interesting facts, equally instructive and entertaining ; of real and supposed characters, both good and bad ; of affecting representations of the nature and life of man ; of discoveries relating to spiritual and eternal things, wonderfully awakening and elevating to the human mind ; of sentences and sayings, the most pungent to the heart and conscience ; of promises unspeakably soothing and transporting on one hand, and of threatenings no less awful and tremendous on the other ; of parables or allegories, generally founded on the most common occurrences of life or objects of nature, strongly marked, and wrought with a divine simplicity, and therefore inexpressibly beautiful and touching ; of imagery more rich, more sublime, more strong, more tender, than is to be found in any other composition, how admired soever ; not to speak of all the diversity of rhetorical figures ; occasionally introduced with admirable propriety, grace, and energy. Oh, my brethren, what a treasure of heavenly eloquence have we here ! How happy should we be, had we hearts to value and heads to improve it !

THE apostle Paul styles the word of God ‘ the sword of the spirit.’ May not we style it the preacher’s sword too ? ‘ quick and powerful ; when skilfully handled ; sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.’

Heb. iv. 12. Indeed, as that great doctor of the church observes to his favourite pupil, 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good word and work,' 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17. It deserves our notice, that when it is said in the text, Apollos was an eloquent man, it is immediately added, 'and mighty in the scriptures : ' and accordingly, we are told at the 29th verse, that 'he mightily convinced the Jews, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.'

3. I mentioned likewise the knowledge of men, as a necessary qualification for the eloquence of the pulpit. I am exceeding sensible, that a thorough knowledge of men is to be acquired only by practising them much, conversing with them long, and seeing them in a variety of scenes and circumstances; in short by wide views, and great experience of the world; advantages, which it must be owned, few, very few preachers enjoy. Therefore we must supply the want of them, the best way we can, by an accurate observation of human nature and life, as far as they fall under our notice, by a careful perusal of those books which give the justest notions of both, especially the best ^{written} ~~wrote~~ historys, and in fine, by marking attentively what passes in our own breasts from time to time.

Now I say, that as in order to work successfully on any subject, we must first know it's nature and

qualitys, so it is obvious that before we attempt to work upon men, of all subjects the most nice, we had need to know them ; to know their opinions, passions, and corruptions ; what are the views that touch them most sensibly, and the motives that have the greatest influence on their minds ; by what avenues, of course, truth may find the readiest access to them, and by what handles they may be most easily taken, and most securely held. To attempt to operate upon mankind without a tolerable acquaintance with these things, would be almost every whit as gross and presumptuous, as for one to profess physic who was ignorant of the animal œconomy, of the various disorders incident to it, and the methods proper for their cure.

A publick teacher should know, not only the nature of man in general, but likewise the particular characters, sentiments, and humours of the people with whom he is immediately concerned ; since it is manifest, that without this, he cannot reasonably expect success, any more than that physician, who should undertake to cure a patient, without knowing either his particular constitution, or the several symptoms of his present distemper.

4. THE last acquired talent I mentioned as necessary to form an eloquent preacher, was a competent knowledge of books, of such at least as are of the greatest use and value.

AMONG these I reckon in the chief place such books as contain the most majestic and amiable representations of the character, administration, and works of God,

and the most just account of the frame, evidences, and design of the gospel, particularly of the marvellous scheme of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ; and also such as treat, with the greatest depth and unction, of the origin, spirit, and progress of true religion, considered as a divine nature and life, communicated to the soul by the influence of God, exerting itself in genuine and substantial effects, and carried on by various means through various stages, till it come ‘unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ,’ and arrive finally at a state of triumphant and immortal blessedness.

NEXT to such writings are those, which display a sublime standard of morals, and abound in the most virtuous and exalted sentiments; or best unfold the constitution, connexions, and obligations of man; or give the most deep insight into the human heart, or present the most comprehensive and natural draughts of men and manners taken from real life, and the history of mankind.

NOR are those authors, I think, to be forgotten who write well on the principal sciences and arts; as it is apparent, that some knowledge of these will not only open and invigorate the mind, but furnish it with a great diversity of lights and analogys for illustrating and embellishing different subjects.

I hope I shall be forgiven, if I take the liberty on this occasion, to recommend to a preacher’s perusal, works of imagination, in a particular manner; those being peculiarly adapted to feed and nourish that fa-

culty, which we observed before is a main ingredient in the composition of an oratour ; to give him a noble race of thought, to enrich his soul with the finest and grandest perceptions, and enable him to paint both natural and spiritual things in the most lively colours, to engage the attention, interest the hearts, and agitate the passions of his hearers at pleasure.

IN general, he ought to be much conversant with books of the highest character for fine writing, in order to improve his taste for composition, to give him a compass and purity of language not to be acquired otherwise, and to form him by degrees to that style which shall be found most fit for the pulpit. Were I to venture at the general definition of such a style, I would call it in a few words simple, yet great ; adorned, yet chaste, animated and strong, at the same time easy, and somewhat diffuse ; and in fine numerous and flowing, without running into the poetical, or swelling into the bombast. It is to be remembered however, that one's manner must be varied in particular instances, according to the subject handled, or the aim proposed. Sometimes for instance, one must use the plain familiar style, sometimes the figured and pathetic, and at others rise into the solemn and majestic ; now spread out his discourse, to explain or amplify a point ; then contract it, to give it greater weight and force. It should likewise be raised or lowered to that pitch or key, which is suited most to the greatest part of the audience.

I need scarce observe upon this article, that a preacher should know what hath been written by the greatest masters on the subject of eloquence, whether sacred or civil, and withal should mark how the several rules laid down by them, have been executed in the most celebrated samples of either kind : often reading and pondering such pieces ; those particularly of the two great oratours of Greece and Rome, with a few of the homilys left us by the best of the ancient fathers ; and also a few, (he will find perhaps but a few) of our modern sermons, that are composed with spirit and taste in that way.

BUT though he ought, no doubt, to make a proper use of all the best models he can find ; let him beware of servilely copying any. If he would be truly original and excellent in his profession, let him give full flight and range to his particular genius, and make what he chooseth to borrow from others in a manner his own, by casting it into a different mould and transfusing a kind of native fire through the whole.

BUT is not such a course of study as hath been now pointed out, too long and too laborious ? I believe not : it will be found, perhaps, upon a strict scrutiny, that in most of the branches before mentioned, the works of uncontested merit and value are in reality not many. And if instead of injudiciously losing ourselves amidst a promiscuous multitude of books of all sorts, we shewed a just distinction, and true discernment, in reading those only, or chiefly, which are of sterling worth in their several kinds ;

a vast deal of time and labour would thus be saved, and incomparably greater advantage reaped.

I shall only add, that the very largest and best reading will after all be little effectual to the purposes of preaching, unless it be accompanied; for, at least a considerable time, with frequent and careful composition; which not only serves to convert what a man reads to solid substance and vital spirit, like the power of digestion in the human body; but is necessary to give him an habit of ranging his thoughts more readily and distinctly, of extending his views to a wider compass, and of expressing himself with greater variety, copiousness, and mastery, on every subject.

THUS much for the talents, both natural and acquired, which appear requisite to our christian orator. Let us now see, how these are to be directed and applied to the great end of preaching; which was

II. THE next general point proposed to be considered. It is abundantly evident that the proper standard, or measure of excellence, in any art, is to be taken from the end which it hath in view. Whatever is calculated adequately to answer that, is said to be according to the standard, or excellent in it's kind. An exact knowledge of the end therefore, and a steady regard to it must regulate the attempts of every performer, in his respective art. What then is the end of preaching, that best of arts, now under consideration? It is obvious, I think, that it can be no other in general, than to make men wise and good;

by instructing them in the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, and persuading them to believe in one and submit to the other. This, my reverend brethren, is the supreme, the ultimate mark we are to fix to ourselves from first to last, and at which we are in one shape or another to aim in all our performances. This is that pole-star, by which we are invariably to steer our course. If the preacher that is possessed of the talents supposed, keeps this constantly in his eye ; then indeed, with the assistance of truth for his chart, of sincerity for his compass, and for his pilot, that good genius who never fails of conducting the pious and the good, he can scarce mistake his way, or fall short of success at last.

LET us survey the general track, in which we may suppose he will proceed. Let us observe a few things for instance, in relation to the spirit and composition of his sermons, and to his manner or deportment in the pulpit.

I. IN relation to the spirit and composition of his sermons : it is scarce necessary to observe, that he will always choose for the subject of them, something of real importance to the religious and moral improvement of his hearers, something that is pregnant with useful and noble truths, such as it becomes a man to deliver, who professes to speak, in the name of the living God, to rational and immortal creatures. He will avoid entirely whatever is not ‘agreeable to the form of sound words, nor good to the use of edifying.’ And he will avoid as much as possible, ‘doubtful disputations,’ or controversys concerning

matters of mere speculation, and the subtil distinctions of partys ; such as lie at a distance from the vitals of religion, and are apt to divert men's attention from these, to breed a wrangling disposition and distempered zeal, extremely pernicious to them ; and as the apostle expresses it, ' to minister questions, ' rather than edifying.' When it happens that any circumstance of necessity or point of prudence leads him to touch upon these subjects, he will always do it with moderation, and never fail of cautioning the people against laying a stress upon things of that nature, or shewing any want of affection for such as differ from them. As to those minute criticisms, trifling conceits, words without a meaning, divisions without a difference, quaint turns, forced allusions, and other frivolous flourishes of a childish or low fancy, which have sometimes filled and debased sermons ; all these he will heartily despise, as alike beneath the majesty of the pulpit and the dignity of true eloquence.

WHEN he is to preach to a popular audience, he will carefully guard against learned inquiries, abstracted reasonings, and great refinements of every kind ; well knowing, that nothing can be fit for the hearers, but what is level to the capacity of the hearers ; and that, as the gospel was mainly intended to be preached to the poor, it must be as absurd as it would be unfair to entertain these, and such as these, with school-lectures, and philosophical dissertations. He certainly spoke like a man of sense as well as conscience, who said on another occasion that ' in the church he had rather speak five words so as to teach

‘ others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.’ 1 Cor. xiv. 19. In effect, we speak in an unknown tongue, when, though we use the common language, we speak what is not understood. In short, our spiritual oratour will lay it down as a sacred maxim, not to bring into the pulpit any thing but what is suited to the end for which the pulpit was erected, viz. the instructing and edifying mankind. But this is not all.

As he will take care never to preach what does not appear expedient or proper : so he will study always to preach in the most useful manner what does ; ‘ commending himself to every man’s conscience in ‘ the sight of God.’ He will think it by no means sufficient, merely to deliver nothing but sound doctrine, or to deliver it with order, connexion, and propriety : since he knows, that one may very possibly do all this, and mistake the mark widely notwithstanding. It may indeed seem strange, yet to me it seems true, that a preacher may propose a very regular method, prosecute it very exactly, express himself all along with abundance of accuracy, and if you will, of elegance too, adorn the whole with many a fine flower, and artificial trapping of language, in short deliver a very pretty harangue a very genteel discourse, as it is commonly termed ; which yet may prove after all but a sorry sermon, and in reality good for little, but to amuse superficial judges and to convince thorough ones, that the man aspires at the reputation without the qualitys of an oratour. Certain it is, a discourse may have all the propertys just now mentioned, and

yet be so cold and dry, or abstruse and scholastic, or some how so uninteresting and remote from life, as never to come home to men's business and bosoms, nor appear at all framed to instruct or move them. The preacher who truly deserves that name, will not, cannot satisfy himself with any thing, but what seems directly calculated to convince and persuade his hearers. If, unhappily at any time, his sermons should not have this tendency, he would condemn them himself, let them have what other qualities they would, or be ever so much applauded by half thinking people. By the way, let it be remembered, that I speak all along of that kind of conviction and persuasion only, which is within the reach of human art, not of those sacred impressions, which are the incommunicable province of a divine teacher.

ENTIRELY governed by this grand principle of usefulness, our modern Apollos will labour, in all his preparations for the pulpit, to turn his thoughts into such a shape, as shall bid fairest for drawing the attention, enlightening the minds, and affecting the hearts of his audience. He will often ask himself, not only whether this observation, that sentiment, or the other argument be just, but whether it will probably be understood and felt by the people? He will often reflect, what topics and what expressions he would use, was he in a natural and unconstrained manner to explain or prove any point to a man of ordinary understanding. As most auditorys, perhaps, are composed chiefly of persons of such an understanding; therefore the same manner with some few al-

terations, will be found I believe to answer pretty universally. This is the general rule. The particular application of it is infinitely various, according to the infinite variety of subjects and occasions which occur.

THIS rule being once admitted, will effectually cut off a number of things which, how ambitiously soever they have been sometimes fought after, are real blemishes, not beautys, in the composition of sermons. I would be understood to mean the scholastic nicety of method, the formal regularity of argument, the constant glitter of shining phrases, and the endless string of rounded periods; which instead of answering the purposes of genuine eloquence, only serve to stiffen a discourse, carry too much the appearance of design, betray too laborious an attention to trifles, and depart too far from the simplicity of nature. In place of these, a certain graceful easiness, a certain happy negligence, if I may be allowed the expression, will be found to have a much better effect; provided it appear from the seriousness of the preacher's air, that this looser manner is owing, not to any want of pains in his studys or of respect to his audience, but solely to his being too deeply impressed and awed with what he is about, to have any leisure, or inclination for minding little things. It is allowed, I think, that the perfection of art in general, lies in concealing art, and making the whole appear the pure expression, as well as effort of nature. A maxim never surely more true, than when applied to subjects of the greatest solemnity and impor-

tance. May we not say therefore on the whole, that the perfection of the pulpit-art lies in the preacher's so involving himself in the grandeur of his subject, and hiding his address under the veil of simplicity, as to turn off the attention of the audience, from the lustre of his talents and the excellence of his performance, to the truths which he delivers ; in fixing their eye upon these, with a kind of severe delight ; in filling their minds with conviction, and their hearts with resolution ; and in sending them away at last silent, grave, and thoughtful, instead of smiling to one another, and applauding him. To do this successfully, is a preacher's highest glory ; to aim at it faithfully, is the next degree of praise. But to return.

I would observe, that a preacher of true taste will choose for ordinary, I do not say always, to make his discourses turn upon some one leading truth, or another ; which shall run through each from beginning to end, and serve to collect the several parts together, and to which they shall all point as to their common center, throwing one joint blaze of light upon it, and being chiefly or solely subservient to that end, so that, if I may be permitted here to borrow a comparison from one of the fine arts, the most of his sermons will resemble in this respect a genuine piece of history-painting, where the subordinate figures, though variously diversified from one another, have yet some general predominant air or feature, which runs through them all, and leads the eye at first sight to the principal figure, for the sake of which

they were designed, and which they all conspire to set off in the most distinguished and affecting manner. It is scarce to be told, how much a proper correspondence among the several heads of a sermon, and the joint subserviency of them all to one ruling point, will contribute to the usefulness, as well as beauty of such a performance, by spreading light and order through the whole, and bearing home the main argument so forcibly and fully on the hearers, as to leave their minds deeply penetrated and entirely possessed with it.

BUT then a preacher of real judgment will take care still to blend variety with this uniformity. He will not dwell long on one single string : he will vary the notes and measures frequently ; and, if I may so express myself, will, like some able master of the musical art, touch off sometimes the softest airs, and then on a sudden strike the instrument with a bolder hand. By these means he will keep the publick ear still awake, and hold the people's thoughts in an agreeable agitation all along.

To speak more plainly, he will address sometimes to one leading power of the mind, sometimes to another. In one part of his discourse he will apply himself principally to inform the understanding, in another to seize the imagination, in another to alarm the conscience, in another to excite such affections of the soul as are suitable to his present design. The first of these is commonly attempted in the beginning and the last reserved for the conclusion. A preacher is certainly never to move the passions, without

convincing the reason of mankind. But for the sake of that variety, we were just now recommending ; perhaps the best way for ordinary, is to make the more speculative and cool, and the more warm and practical parts of a sermon, succeed each other by turns ; though the preacher undoubtedly should always flame most towards the end. Thus much is clear, that neither is to be excluded ; light without heat in this instance is unaffecting ; heat without light, transient ; and both when separate from each other, useless.*

* As to the particular detail or order of composition for the pulpit, no one constant rule could properly be given. That must be determined by the preacher's own judgment, upon a due consideration of particular circumstances. As these are very different at different times, so various forms and methods must no doubt be practised. The following hints however, founded in reason, and justified by experience, may be of use in general. As many heads or divisions, and no more should be commonly laid out in each discourse, as can be sufficiently amplified within the bounds of it, so as to be rendered sensible to the hearers. They should be quite distinct from one another, at the same time that they all concentrate in the main point. The most eminent and luminous topics should still be chosen, and those of inferior moment and lustre passed over without scruple. For our business, I apprehend, is not to huddle a great many things together at once, but to select a few that appear of the greatest beauty and importance, and to place these in their most advantageous

THE methods of adressing to the several powers are innumerable. The following may be reckoned

attitudes. In treating each particular, it should be insisted on just long enough to affect the audience, without tiring them. To hit so nice a medium will undoubtedly require great judgment. But yet it may be hit, if they be led on in a natural track step by step, from one reflexion and discovery to another ; if they be still made to expect something new, instructive, or interesting, as they advance ; if a glimpse of it be now and then given them at a distance, and it seem gradually to unfold itself to their view ; if agreeable rounds of thought, so to speak, be frequently taken ; if a succession, in short, of intellectual prospects be opened from time to time ; and if this variety of matter be accompanied, when necessary, with a variety of voice and action. By these methods, joined with the others abovementioned, it is possible, I think, to sustain the spirit of a discourse, and to allure the curiosity, and fix the attention of an audience to the last, which is never indeed so well, if at all, done, as when their thoughts are kept in a kind of pleasing hurry, continual exercise is given to their active powers, and that inextinguishable thirst of novelty, so natural to the human mind is gratified with encreasing delight. It may be proper to observe, that for the same reason, the most plain and practical subjects should be seasoned with a mixture of speculation and entertainment, when they will easily admit of it ; and that the most common and familiar truths should be enlivened and ennobled by the turn which is given them. I will add too, that those parts of our sermons which are most pathetic and vehement, should generally be but short, as the stronger emo-

a few of the principal ; a concise and animated narration of facts ; a series of proofs, not too many, led on in an easy, popular manner ; objections fairly stated, and fully answered ; cases supposed, reasoned on, and applied ; propositions traced with perspicuity to their first principles, in the way of a natural induction or detail ; frequent appeals, lodged sometimes to reason, sometimes to conscience ; repeated and pointed interrogations ; short dialogues, observations supported and exemplifyd from scripture and from life ; characters in both, very often

tions of men's minds are naturally so, and they have need of frequent unbendings to recover their elastic force. A remark which holds peculiarly true of the people of these nations, whose prevailing genius is of a cool and sober strain.

After all, it is possible that a great deal of what is here advanced concerning the eloquence of the pulpit, may be deemed by many, needless refinement. And perhaps it would really be so in some respects, were we never to preach to any but sensible and serious hearers. But I am persuaded it will be found upon trial, that no little art is necessary to rouse the attention, inform the understandings and impress the hearts of the more gross and thoughtless hearers ; who in most places, I doubt, are not the least part. To preach to the intelligent requires sense : to preach to the ignorant requires sense, and skill too. The first will attend to truth, whenever they hear her voice : the last will not attend to her, till she once engage them by her beautiful dress, attractive air, and insinuating manner.

drawn, at one time exhibited single, at another contrasted, or compared together, most frequently the last ; pithy remarks, and touching sentences, scattered up and down ; points of importance, amplified, heightened and swelled out ; different scenes and objects, in this and the other world, painted with strength and justness ; various beings or persons, chiefly of the human kind, introduced in particular circumstances, briefly but strongly expressing their thoughts and feelings ; exclamations quick and few, inspired and justified by the occasion ; bold apostrophe's thrown out in an heat, but neither frequent nor long ; sudden transitions ; moving and home addresses to different sorts of men ; abrupt falls of devout affection, of virtuous indignation, of melting compassion, of pious zeal ; and to mention no more, since it would be endless to mention all, metaphors and comparisons, apt and unforced, fetched from those quarters chiefly, which lie most obvious to common observation.

It is not to be imagined that all these things are to be introduced constantly into every sermon, or at any time crowded together in an heap. It is evident they must be variously blended, proportioned and applied, according to the nature of the subjects and character of the audience. To judge this truly, and execute it naturally, is the whole art of preaching ; impossible indeed to be attained, without the divine assistance, great attention, long practice, and I will

add, the free and candid criticism of some person or persons of equal judgment, taste and friendship.

LET me conclude this head with one observation more. It is this, that a preacher should consider his audience as composed of two very different and indeed opposite classes, those of good and bad men, and remember, that under each of these there is included a great diversity of dispositions, characters, and cases ; to which he is to adapt himself as much as possible, 'reproving, rebuking, exhorting with 'all long suffering and doctrine ;' sometimes, like another Boanerges, thundering to his hearers, and shaking them with the terrors of Sinai ; at others, proving, like the more amiable Barnabas, a son of consolation, and soothing them with all the melody of Zion. In a word, he should study, like 'that 'faithful and wise steward, our master speaks of, 'to give every man his portion of meat in due season.' Luke xii. 42. We proceed now,

2. To consider a little his manner or deportment in the pulpit. I imagine then, I see him standing in that sacred place, with an erect, yet modest mien, the picture of a mind that is firm but free from arrogance ; with an animated yet composed countenance, the mirror of a soul entirely awake, at the same time collected in itself. I imagine, I hear him speak like a man full of his subject, possessed with the very spirit of it, and labouring under the weight of those conceptions which it inspires. In such parts of his discourse as are naturally cool, his voice, aspect, and demeanour are plain, equal, fixed : in

such as require pathos, his voice is vehement, without straining ; his eyes express his very soul, without affectation ; his action is nervous and significant, yet smooth and temperate, the unstudied result and immediate movement of his inward feelings, never exceeding the modesty of nature, appearing deficient rather than overdone, and always chastised by a commanding sense of decency. Sometimes he sinks into a deep and slow solemnity, overwhelmed with the majesty of some marvellous, grand, or awful consideration ; sometimes he bursts into a torrent of rapid eloquence, irresistably borne away by a kind of divine enthusiasm ; sometimes he stops short in a sudden pause of recollected silence, as unable to vent the workings of his bosom, or clothe the greatness of his perceptions in adequate language. Now he melts into a mild insinuating tenderness, but without whining ; and now he rises to a superiour force and emphasis, but without presumption or fierceness. As he cautiously avoids a dull unmeaning uniformity of gesture, and the same constantly returning tone or cadence, things totally inconsistent with true elocution ; so in all the variations both of his voice and action, he shuns with the strictest care every appearance of art, and seems manifestly to follow, throughout his whole performance, the present stream of sentiment and affection, flowing spontaneously from the occasion.*

* It was not judged proper, in a discourse of this nature, to enter more minutely into the rules of elo-

AMIDST such inspiration on his part, (for a sort of inspiration, we must, I think, call it) it is not like-

cution. But I cannot forbear regretting here, that a matter of such vast importance to the art under consideration, should be so generally neglected or misunderstood. There is a common apprehension prevails indeed, that a strict regard to those rules in preaching, would be esteemed theatrical. And the dread, perhaps, of incurring this imputation is a restraint upon many. But is it not possible to attain a just and expressive manner, perfectly consistent with the gravity of the pulpit, and perfectly distinct from the more passionate, strong and diversified action of the theatre? And is it not possible to hit off this manner so easily and naturally, as to leave no room for just censure? An affair this, it must be owned, of the utmost delicacy; in which we shall probably often miscarry, and meet with abundance of criticism at first. But still I imagine, that through the regulations of taste, the improvements of experience, the corrections of friendship, the feelings of piety, and the gradual mellowings of time, such an elocution may be acquired as is above delineated, and such as, when acquired, will make it's way into the hearts of the hearers, through their ears and eyes, with a delight to both that is seldom felt; whilst, contrary to what is commonly practised, it will appear to the former the very language of nature, and present to the latter the lively image of the preacher's soul. Were a taste for this kind of elocution once to take place, it is difficult to say, how much the preaching-art would gain by it. Pronunciation would be studied, an ear would be formed, the voice would be modulated: every feature of the face, every motion of the

ly the hearers will remain without any emotion on their's ; he marks them however with his eye in the run of his discourse, and observes if they seem to enter into it with pleasure, if they listen with an appearance of attention and concern, expressed either by an eager and steady look, or by their countenances turned and fixed downward ; in short, if there reigns a profound stillness and awful suspense through the assembly. If this be the case, he is encouraged to proceed in the same manner. But if on the contrary, he should perceive in any stage of his progress a general coldness and listlessness among his hearers

hands, every posture of the body would be brought under right management. A graceful, correct, and animated expression in all these, would be ambitiously sought after ; mutual criticisms and friendly hints would be universally encouraged ; light and direction would be borrowed from every quarter, and from every age. The best models of antiquity would in a particular manner be admired, surveyed, and imitated. The sing-song voice and the see-saw gestures, if I may be allowed to use those expressions, would of course be exploded ; and in time nothing would be admitted, at least approved, among performers, but what was decent, manly, and truly excellent in the kind. Even the people themselves would contract insensibly a growing relish for such a manner ; and those preachers would at last be in chief repute with all, who followed nature, overlooked themselves, appeared totally absorbed in their subject, and spoke with real propriety and pathos from the immediate impulse of truth and virtue.

does he condemn them entirely ? No, he immediately suspects some failure on his side, something amiss in his performance just at that time. What course does he take ? He alters instantly his voice and action. If this prove effectual, it is well. If not, he quits without hesitation the present scent, passes on to something else more promising, and ceases not to try every method of address, till he hath engaged and fixed his audience ; turning the subject now on one side, then on another ; placing it's several members in their most alluring lights ; and, on topics of prime importance, throwing out all the riches of his art, and the most masterly touches of nature ; whilst by frequent breaks and rests in his discourse, he affords a temporary repose to himself and his hearers, that both may return to the charge with renewed ardour.

BUT perhaps it will be said, is not this a picture without an original, a mere fanciful representation, that hath nothing corresponding to it in life or nature ? Can any man then positively affirm that it is so ? It may be we do not know such a preacher. That indeed is our misfortune, but does not prove that there is none such. Yet have not we known some who came pretty near to the character just now drawn ? And how difficult soever it may be to come fully up to it, who can say that it is impossible, or to what pitch a man of genius may arrive with proper assistances, and unwearyed application ? especially if he be governed and animated in all his attempts by a sublime spirit of religion ; which was,

III. THE last general point proposed. Now I say that such a spirit will be of noble use to a preacher, with regard both to his private studys, and to his public performances.

I. WITH regard to his private studys ; it will be of noble use to direct and inspire him in the prosecution of them. I do not pretend indeed, that he either will or ought to confine himself wholly to such books and speculations as have an immediate connexion with his office ; though it appears, I think, from what was before suggested, that there are few books or speculations of real significance, which may not contribute in one shape or another to qualify him for it ; so that at any rate, a circle extensive enough is still left him. But those parts of study, which have the nearest relation to his profession, and may be of the greatest subserviency to it, will undoubtedly be always tasted by him with the highest relish, and pursued with the closest assiduity. But in whatever course of reading, or of thinking, he is at any time engaged, he will be sure to keep his favourite design still in view ; and when any thing occurs in either, that pleases or touches him more than ordinary, he will be naturally led to ask himself, how such a train of reflexion for instance, or such a series of reasoning, or such a sentiment, fact, or observation, may be introduced in his publick addresses, with the greatest propriety and advantage ? Nor will this man reckon any expence of time or any labour of thought too much, whether in his general studys, or in his particular preparations for the pulpit, which

may any way conduce to fit him for serving that master, and promoting those interests, that are infinitely dear to him, by preaching truths which are the delight and admiration of his soul.

2. THE same sublime spirit of religion will have a glorious effect on all his public performances. Being possessed with a disinterested, pure, and ardent love to his Saviour and his fellow creatures, 'he will not,' we may believe, 'preach himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and himself the servant of the people for Christ's sake,' 2 Cor. iv. 5. Having imbibed the meek and lowly spirit of his master, he will not be ambitious of saying fine things, to win applause, but of saying useful things, to win souls. Far from fixing his attention on his own interest and reputation, and thereby departing from the simplicity, and diminishing the efficacy, of the gospel; he will seek to throw himself and his art into the shade. Modesty is graceful in every speaker; nay absolutely necessary to compleat his character. It will even supply many defects; whereas the defect of it can hardly be supplied by any other qualification, how great soever. But it is peculiarly graceful in the christian oratour, and indeed so essential to his character, that without it, his eloquence will be esteemed an ostentation of his parts, his warmth artifice, and his address affectation. Where this amiable grace shines in an eminent degree, it steals into the hearts of the audience with a silent, but irresistible force, procures universal regard, whilst it pretends not to claim it, and persuades more powerfully than a thousand arguments.

As it is the genuine offspring and inseparable attendant of that poverty of spirit, and simplicity of heart, which are the corner stones, as well as touch stones of christian virtue, so I take it to be the only proper counter-poise to that vanity, and self-sufficiency, which are often imputed to the preaching order, and which, wherever the imputation appears to be just, are always obstacles to their acceptance and success.

BUT whilst the truly christian preacher avoids this extreme, he will guard against the opposite one of false modesty, as what would discompose that manly assurance which becomes an advocate for the best of causes, and damp that generous fire which ought to warm all his discourses. 'He will never,' in any instance, 'be ashamed of the gospel of Christ' having found it, by his own experience, to be 'the power of God to salvation.' Rom. i. 16. He will insist particularly on those divine peculiarities of it, the cordial belief of which hath afforded himself unspeakable comfort and edification. Having seen the transcendent glories of a redeemer, and felt his omnipotent grace upon his own heart, he will be inexpressibly solicitous to bring others into an acquaintance with him. And being deeply smitten with the beauty of holiness, and ravished with it's sweetness, he will be no less solicitous to acquaint them with the great practical design of christianity, and will 'affirm constantly that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works,' Tit. iii. 8. In short his supreme study will be to explain and recommend the gospel, considered as an

humbling and a sanctifying scheme, contrived to lead men from themselves to God through a mediatur, for pardon and assistance, and in that way to form them to a divine nature and life. But it were impossible to describe the zeal which he will testify on all occasions for promoting those sacred interests among mankind. His own soul being touched and inkindled, as by a live coal from the altar of God, will like the sparks be ever flying upward; and whilst it is mounting aloft to the regions of divine truth and love, will strive to carry other souls up along with it. 'Having been converted himself, he will labour to convert and to strengthen his brethren.' Luke xxii. 32. Such a deep regard for their happiness, and such an undissembled concern for the misery to which they are exposed, will naturally appear in his whole manner, as cannot miss of winning their hearts, and giving a charm and energy even to the plainest things which he delivers.

NEED I observe to you, my brethren, that the ethereal flame which burns in his bosom will not only insinuate itself through all his sentiments and feelings, but breathe out powerfully in the most fervent expressions of both? 'The unction he hath received from the holy one will teach him all things.' 1 John ii. 20. 'The secret of the Lord will be with him, and he will shew him his covenant.' Ps. xxv. 14. As the face of Moses shone, when he descended from the mount after conversing with God, so the fellowship which this man enjoys with the father and with the son, causes his soul to sparkle and radiate,

as it were, with a kind of celestial light ; that will in some sort be reflected from his sermons, and spread such a lustre over them as must needs be perceptible to his hearers, at least to those among them, of spiritual discernment. By being often conversant with the most venerable forms of the divinity, and laying himself open to the influence of so august a presence, he cannot fail of conceiving great thoughts and of forming noble designs in his profession, such as will wonderfully enlarge and inspire his soul, and serve at once to actuate and prompt him in every performance.

‘ OUT of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,’ Mat. xii. 34. It is an observation of our Saviour’s, upon another occasion ; but never more applicable than on this. What he subjoins to it concerning every good man, is particularly true of every pious preacher. Such a preacher ‘ out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things,’ Mat. xii. 35. The rise, the operations, the growth, and the joys of the divine life ; all these he will describe truly and strongly from the personal fund of his own experience. He will paint the several virtues with a masterly hand, in their most just proportions, and amiable colours : for he will paint them from their living and beautiful originals in his own breast. He will warmly recommend, because he warmly loves them. He will exclaim against their contraries, with an honest indignation and becoming boldness, because he detests, and is conscious that he detests them. A feeling of the integrity of his heart, and a conviction of

the goodness of his cause, will fortify and bear him out on all occasions ; so that like his master he will teach ‘ as one having authority.’

SUCH a preacher will not come into the pulpit as an actor comes upon the stage, to personate a feigned character, and forget his real one ; to utter sentiments, or represent passions not his own. No, the man and the preacher are in his case one and the same. When he is in the pulpit, the man appears as well as the preacher. When he is out of it, the preacher appears as well as the man. In the pulpit he is the man wound up to an higher tone ; the man seen in the more solemn light of a serious character. Out of it, he is the preacher unbent, the preacher seen in the softer light of ordinary humanity. Or it may be taken thus. In the pulpit, the serious character appears in him, all pure and refulgent. Out of it, mixed and shaded ; but still it is the same serious character ; the man of virtue, the man of piety, still appears. But to return.

EVERY word that proceeds from such a preacher, will be big with feeling and concern of mind. Every thought will issue from the center of his soul. He will speak naturally, for he will speak because he believes ; he will appear in earnest, for he will be in earnest. To say all that needs to be said, in a very little compass : Whatever he advances will have a native air, a peculiar stamp of sincerity, that inexpressible kind of genuine look, which belongs alone to unaffected worth ; which art may imitate, but cannot reach ; and which is infinitely more persuasive than the

highest art without it possibly can be. For in this case there is perceived a kind of sympathy between the heart of the speaker and the hearts of the hearers : the religious passion vibrates and darts from one to the other ; and a secret but powerful and instantaneous stroke is felt, which may be compared in this view to the surprizing effect produced by communication in the case of some late noted experiments.*

Put all these things now together. Suppose that to the natural force of genius, and to the intellectual improvements before mentioned, those religious ones last spoken of are added ; and then suppose that the spirits, the imagination, all the facultys of the preacher, are heated and exalted by the action of a discourse, by the presence of an auditory, by their attention especially, and in fine by the solemnity of the place : oh my brethren, what, what must be the combined influence of all this ; whilst the whole man swells and glows with one pathetic grand sensation, which breaking from him with its full force spreads and circulates among his hearers, penetrates their inmost souls, and shakes them to the very foundations !

I will conclude this discourse as I proposed, with a few motives to press the study of christian oratory on us who are ministers and preachers of the gospel. I say then briefly, that this study is our duty, and will be our advantage.

I. It is our duty. But how can that be ? it may possibly be asked, since we find no less a preacher

* The experiments in electricity.

than the apostle Paul declaring expressly to the Corinthians, that ' he came not to them with excellency of speech or of wisdom, that his speech and preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, not in the words which it teacheth, 1 Cor. ii. 1, 4, 13. Is not the apostle Paul allowed in general to be a noble pattern for succeeding preachers? But how shall we reconcile many of the former notions to his practice in this particular? The objection is plausible: let us consider it.

WE are to remember that Corinth was a famous city in Greece. At the time when our apostle wrote, it seems that country was over-run with a set of men called Sophists; a petulant disputing tribe, who prided themselves in being able, by dint of argument and rhetoric, to overthrow the plainest truths, or to support the most apparent errors, who corrupted the youth and misled the people; entangling them in a maze of falacious subtilty, and dazzling them with a specious, but adulterate eloquence; introducing by these means a general scepticism in opinion, and of course, a prevailing profligacy of manners: on which accounts they are exposed with just severity by some of the wisest teachers and best authors of ancient times, as is sufficiently known to those who are conversant with their immortal writings. Now it appears highly probable, that our apostle, in the expressions referred to, had these and such like corruptors chiefly in his eye, as it was exceeding necessary to guard those christians to whom he wrote, against their insinuating and poisonous infection, than which

nothing could be more repugnant to that wisdom which was from above ; since that did eminently require a modest, child-like, and docile disposition : nor would so self denying and spiritual a discipline as that of the cross, ever be relished by those of a contrary temper. Therefore in the preceeding chapter, we find the same apostle crying out, with an air of noble contempt, ‘ where is the wise ? where is the scribe ? where is the disputer of this world ? has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?’ 1 Cor. i. 20. with much more to the same purpose.

BUT whatever there may be in this, it is abundantly evident from other considerations, that the apostle did not mean to disclaim, or to condemn sound eloquence rightly applyed. He who was called by way of eminence the preacher, says of himself, ‘ that he sought to find out acceptable words ;’ and adds that ‘ the words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies.’ Eccl. xii. 10, 11. Our apostle admonishes Timothy ‘ not to neglect the gift of God which was in him, but to stir it up, and to approve himself a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.’ 2 Tim. i. 6. — ii. 15. Indeed St. Paul was a man of too much candour, learning, and judgment, to depreciate any useful talent whatever, much less a talent which hath always been esteemed by wise men, and employed by able ministers as a powerful instrument for promoting the cause of religion. It is recorded, we see, to the honour of Apollos, that he was an eloquent man. The evange-

lical prophet, speaking probably in the person of the Messias, says, that 'the Lord God had given him ' the tongue of the learned, that he should know ' how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.' If. l. 4. And our Saviour, we find, promises ' to give his apostles a mouth and wisdom which all ' their adversaries should not be able to gainsay nor ' resist.' Luke xxi. 15.

BUT what is fairly decisive on the point in question is, that this great apostle was in fact an orator of the very first rate himself, and made as much, perhaps more use of human eloquence than any other preacher that we know of. From what is left us of that wonderful man, it were, I think, easy to shew that there is scarce a single figure belonging to the most perfect oratory, which hath not been adopted by him with the greatest force and beauty; and particularly that there is an impetuosity, a vehemence, a flame, in his manner which is quite peculiar to himself, and undeniably shews him to have been a man of very superiour genius and parts.

LET us then, my reverend brethren, according to the measure of grace and of gifts bestowed upon each of us, be ambitious of imitating Solomon, and Paul, and Apollos, and all the great men of the preaching order, in all generations. Does not our religion, does not our master merit this from us? Are we not unjust and unfaithful to both, if we neglect it? Where is our zeal for the Lord of hosts? Where is our veneration for the Saviour of the world? Where is our esteem for his glorious gospel? Where

is our charity to immortal souls ? Where, I say, are our regards for all these, if we do not what in us lies to advance their interests.

WHAT incredible pains did the most celebrated orators of antiquity take to excel in their profession ! What labour of reading, thinking, writing, speaking, did they chearfully undergo for that purpose ! How many schools, how many masters, how many different and distant places, did they go to, in order to learn their art more perfectly ! What severe temperance did they practise in the prosecution of their studys ! What discouraging obstacles, seemingly indeed insuperable, did they bravely combat and conquer ! Then how did they ransack all the riches of art and nature, all the mines of fancy, and all the stores of learning ; exert every power of language, every charm of music, every energy and grace of action ; leave nothing in short unattempted, that seemed within the reach of humanity, by which they might convince, captivate, persuade and transport their hearers ! Blessed Jesus, when shall the preachers of thy divine religion, learn to emulate these honest professors of human eloquence ? What shall we say ? Is the promoting the most extensive and durable interests of society, the saving souls from vice and misery, the leading them to perfection and happiness, the spreading the kingdom of truth and righteousness, with the honours of that adorable person who is at the head of it ; are these, my brethren, designs of less importance, or of less power to inspire, than the deciding questions concerning peace and

war, concerning political orders in a state or city ; concerning the lives of particular persons, or the rights of private property, or something less material, perhaps, than any of those.

BUT can any height of eloquence be alone sufficient to secure success in concerns of a sacred nature, as it hath done and may do in such as are merely civil ? We do not pretend it. We are persuaded, that how fairly soever we subordinate teachers may aim at success, there is only one supreme and efficacious teacher, who can command it. Even a ‘ Paul may plant, and an Apollos water ;’ but still it is God who, in the spiritual as well as natural husbandry, must ‘ give the increase.’ He, indeed, can reform mankind by the meanest instruments, as effectually as by the most noble. ‘ Out of the mouth ‘ of babes and sucklings, hast thou, oh Lord ordained strength.’ Ps. viii. 2. ‘ And the foolish things ‘ of the world, hast thou chosen, to confound the ‘ wise ; that no flesh might glory in thy presence, ‘ and the excellency of the power might be of thyself alone.’ 1 Cor. i. 27, 29.—2 Cor. iv. 7. ‘ This ‘ my brethren, is the doing of the Lord, and ought ‘ to be marvellous in our eyes ?’ But what follows from thence ? Because the most enticing words of man’s wisdom will not prevail, unless they are seconded by the demonstration of the spirit, and the power of God ; does it follow, that the demonstration of reason and the power of human art and language are therefore to be laid aside ? How far these may go in their effects upon the hearers, and what

those boundarys are, beyond which they cannot go ; I apprehend, it is impossible for us to determine. But one thing is clear, and there we may rest. We have a certain part assigned us by the great manager of the universal drama. We are concerned with that, and no more. Let us take care to study our part thoroughly, and to act it gracefully : the rest we may safely leave to heaven. If heaven see fit to grant success, it is well. If not, we however shall be no losers. Our well-meant endeavours will be sure to turn to our own advantage : which was,

2. THE other motive I proposed to urge ; and with it I shall wind up the whole. What advantage then shall we reap from this course ? Much every way.

THE plan of study in which it will engage us, will fill up the vacant hours of life worthily, furnish a perpetual variety of the most rational, manly, and elegant entertainment, and exclude a thousand little cares, and low gratifications, which contract our minds, and degrade our characters. Would it be refining too much to add, that reading and speculation pursued with true taste, will beget by degrees a certain dignity of thought that will probably be accompanied with a correspondent dignity of behaviour ? This is certain, that it will greatly improve our parts and performances, and withal oblige us to live more abstracted from company and the world ; both which are circumstances, that must needs render us more respected and easy, as well as useful.

THEN again, that devotion and those virtues which we have shewn to be necessarily connected with christian eloquence ; how honourable and happy will they make us ! How honourable ! What countenance and friendship will they procure us from our master ! What affection from the best men ! And what reverence even from the worst ! How much weight and authority will they add to all our instructions ; whilst the hearers have it to say, the minister, the preacher is a worthy man ! What a generous freedom, and undaunted confidence will they give ourselves, whilst our own hearts condemn us not, but secretly whisper to us, that we believe the doctrines and practise the precepts, which we preach ! How happy too will they make us ! What inward establishment, tranquillity, and triumph, will they naturally produce ! What unutterable joys in the immediate exercise, and after review ! How gay and goodly will every thing appear, when beheld through such a medium ! How fair the universe, it's frame, it's government, it's author ! How fair the very afflictions which he sends ! Even death itself, how fair ! And oh the bright, transporting prospects which will open beyond it —

WHAT shall I say more ? If we succeed in our attempts for the reformation of mankind, it will surely be a mighty accession to our felicity. If we do not, we shall still however have the satisfaction, the sublime satisfaction, to know, that we have done what became us. ‘ He too whom we serve, is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of

- ‘ love ; and though Israel should not be gathered,
- ‘ yet we shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,
- ‘ and our God shall be our strength.’ Amen.

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DE A R and reverend sir, the scene which now opens upon you is important and difficult. It is fit you should enter on it with a solemn pause. You are now to engage more immediately in a design which hath employed all the zeal of prophets, and apostles, and evangelists, and all the preachers of righteousness in every country, and in every age ; in a design, in which all the good spirits of the upper world do, no doubt, warmly interest themselves ; in a design, for promoting which, the Son of God hath performed and suffered, and is still performing the greatest things ; and finally, in a design, which we have reason to believe, is the highest scheme of the great and good parent of all, and the grand aim of all the various, extensive, and mighty operations of his spirit and providence, through all the periods of time, and generations of men, from the birth of the world to it's general consummation. Yes, sir, you are now called to be a fellow-worker with God himself, as well as with all the members of the kingdom of light, and with the glorious head of it, in spreading the triumphs of that kingdom here below. ——— In spreading them how ? By diffusing the light of divine truth, and the warmth of divine love all round you, particularly through that congregation which is now committed to your care. There-

fore every time you view this congregation, every time you think of it, this affecting, this exalting reflexion will naturally present itself : here is a set of creatures endowed with reason, intended for immortality, and baptized into the christian name, who are intrusted to my inspection by the great shepherd and bishop of souls. I am to feed this flock of God with knowlege ; I am to watch it with care ; I am to lead it to green pastures by the still waters, to the dutys and the joys of a religious life ; I am to go before it myself as an example to the flock, a pattern of good works, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity ; I am to do every thing in short that in me lies, to conduct this people in the paths of righteousness, to the beatific presence, and thus on my part to extend the spiritual empire of God by adding to the number of it's loyal subjects, and to that sum of final happiness, which was the ultimate end of it's erection. Oh glorious undertaking, in comparison of which the boasted enterprises of the heroes of this world, are to be esteemed at best but as the play of children ? Does not your breast, sir, take fire already at the thought ? Does not your heart leap with joy, whilst you entertain it ? Will you think much to spend, or to be spent, in the prosecution of such a design ?

NUMEROUS and arduous indeed are the dutys, in which the prosecution of it will necessarily engage you. The substance of these dutys is known sufficiently, the spirit of them is not. The elevated genius of piety, mentioned in the former discourse, will

be the best prompter and instructor here ; especially if it be joined with that spiritual prudence which is peculiarly necessary in the sacred office. This, sir, is a virtue which heaven must bestow, and experience improve. My experience hath been too little, to enable or to entitle me to say a great deal upon that subject. I beg leave however to hint a few things in relation to it.

THIS spiritual prudence is evidently founded on a just perception of the propriety and decorum of actions and of things, on a wise reflexion upon the conduct of others, and a strict attention to one's own. It requires a certain coolness of blood, and composure of thought. It is the sister and companion of that wisdom which is from above. It is the guide and guardian of life. It was recommended and exemplified at once by our divine master ; a maxim of whose school, and a rule of whose conduct, we all know, it was, to join the wisdom of the serpent to the harmlessness of the dove ; a maxim and rule of marvellous depth, utility, and beauty ; discovering both a sagacity and a benignity in the person who taught and practised it, that can never be enough admired ; most worthy indeed of him who spake and acted as never man spake or acted. As well in this, as in every other instance, it will be your interest and your glory to learn of Christ. Your imbibing thoroughly this part of his divine philosophy, will contribute as much perhaps as any thing, to make you wise to win souls. It will render you ingenious in discovering and dextrous in employing, the most likely means

for that purpose. It will teach you to ‘ take heed ‘ to yourself and to your doctrine,’ directing you both as to your deportment, and as to your ministrations.

As to your deportment, it will direct you how to maintain the decency and grace of character ; and ‘ to walk circumspectly, not as a fool, but as wise.’ Without speaking of those grosser miscarriages, which I will not once suppose you capable of committing ; it will guard you even against many flighter mistakes, which, though they may appear trifling perhaps in themselves, are far, very far from being so in their consequences.

It will make you cautious of mingling much with the world, or becoming common in the public eye ; a circumstance, which, without extraordinary virtues and extraordinary opportunitys of shewing them, seldom fails of breeding contempt, at least indifference. When you step from your retirement, you will take care to preserve, as much as possible, that recollection and seriousness, which you have acquired there, and to carry these into life with you ; that you may not be thrown out of yourself, or off your guard by the encounters of company and the incidents of conversation.

IN company, your behaviour will be sedate, but not fullen ; chearful, but not indiscreetly gay ; ‘ your ‘ conversation will be seasoned with salt,’ as the scripture expresses it, ‘ so as to minister grace to the ‘ hearers, and serve for the use of edifying.’ Not that you will ‘ cast pearls before swine,’ to use the

strong language of our Saviour, or have no regard to times, places, and persons. But certainly, as often as you can do it with propriety, you will choose to introduce such discourse, or to insinuate such reflexions, as may serve to make those about you, wiser and better, at least, to convince them, that you wish they may be so.

I have observed frequently, that the neglect of this in those of our profession, hath been condemned by persons the farthest in the world from a grave turn; who though perhaps they regard not the decorum of their own characters, are nevertheless extremely sensible and extremely displeased, if at any time we regard not the decorum of our's. Possibly indeed, they may appear entertained with a frivolous behaviour or conversation in the mean time. But probably they will censure or ridicule us for it afterwards.

WHEN you have occasion to be among the people, and you will not be among them often, but when you really have occasion, you will behave with affability always, with familiarity never; shewing such dignity, that no man may despise you, and withal, such modesty, that every man may love you. In imitation of the humane apostle, you will become all things to all men without departing however from that unalterable integrity and uniform greatness of conduct, which he seems to point at when he says, 'if I seek to please men, then am I not the servant of Jesus Christ.' In a word, as the same apostle expresses it with the greatest justness, you will 'seek to please men for their good to edification,' no far-

ther. To affect any other popularity than this, you will ever esteem a poor pursuit, and to possess it, as poor an acquisition.

THIS spiritual prudence of which I am now speaking, will likewise be of excellent use to direct you in your ministrations. It will teach you how to suit yourself to the different tempers, understandings and circumstances of your people ; how to instruct the ignorant, rouse the secure, confirm the weak, comfort the mourners in Zion, whether in health, in sickness, or at death, by applications proportioned to the capacity, and adapted to the case of each. It will teach you when and how to commend and to reprove ; never to do one without reason, nor the other without necessity, and always to do one without flattery, and the other without passion. It will teach you to avoid all personal reflexions in public, which seldom do good, but often harm ; and when you admonish in private, to choose the most fit seasons, and to study the most engaging manner, such a manner as may convince the person you are admonishing, that nothing but faithfulness to God, and friendship to him, could induce you to use that freedom.

WHEN you find it necessary, in any instance, to express a just indignation against bold or obstinate offenders, the same prudence will teach you how far to indulge it, and in what instances to temper it with the patience of charity, and the meekness of wisdom. It will teach you what truths the people are able to bear, and what they are not ; so as to

prevent your flashing too much light into distempered or weak eyes, and attacking popular errors in too hasty or direct a manner, such as by shocking would rather rivet than remove them. It will help you to discern the different stages of the christian life in which any of your flock may happen to be, and will lead you accordingly to minister strong meat to men, and to feed with milk those who are yet but babes in Christ. In fine, it will enable you to take the most proper methods to persuade your people, that there is nothing in the world which you have so much at heart as their welfare and that it is them not theirs, that you seek. Indeed, if you can once persuade them thoroughly of this, the success of your instructions is in a manner certain; provided at least they be accompanied with the light and charm of a worthy example, and the powerful influence of prayer to God for his blessing.

Oh sir! what is there good or great, that may not be expected from the endeavours of that minister who, unlike those hollow-hearted teachers in our Saviour's time (would to God there were no such teachers in our's!) who, unlike them, does as well as says; who preaches what he feels, and is what he preaches; whose sermons are the transcript of his soul, and whose life is the enforcement of his sermons, or rather a sermon itself, expressing in a kind of silent eloquence, more emphatic and prevailing than any words, the very pathos and sublime of virtue! And how compleat must the effect be, when all is crowned with frequent and fervent supplication to

heaven for that illumination, aid, and benediction, which heaven never refuses to them who ask it, and which will always lead them who obtain it, to still higher degrees of piety and usefulness ! But it is time I should turn myself to the people.

You have heard, my brethren of this congregation, concerning the duty which lies upon your minister. If he perform that duty, as I trust he will perform it, in so doing he will be sure to save himself. But he thinks not this enough. He is ambitious of saving you likewise. But remember, he cannot save you against your wills, or without your endeavours. He is ambitious of taking you all if possible to heaven along with him. But he cannot force you to go thither. He is ready, christians, to point out the road to you, to take you by the hand, and to encourage you in the way. But still you must walk on your own feet. You must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

FOR instance now ; you must read, hear, and meditate on the word of God ; you must worship him in your closets and familys ; you must catechise, correct, and reprove your children, commit them to God, teach them to read and pray, and be good, and set them a godly example ; you must repent of your sins, confess them, forsake them, and make reparation to those you have injured ; you must live soberly, do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God ; you must forgive your enemys, and do good for evil, do harm to no body, speak truth to every body, shew kindness to one another, and do to

all as you would that they should do to you ; and when you have done your utmost, you must account yourselves unprofitable servants, and fly from yourselves to the mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, as the great foundation of all your hopes in time, and of all your happiness in eternity.

THIS, my friends, this is your duty ; which you must perform with the help of God, every man among you for himself. Or is your minister, think you, to perform it for you ? What, then, can he go to heaven for you too ? Or can he answer for you at the bar of God ? No, no ! He must answer for himself, and you must answer for yourselves. He must stand or fall to his own master : so must you. It is his business to tell you your duty : it is your business to do it. You expect indeed he should assist you in it : you expect he should love you, instruct you, exhort you, pray for you : you have a right to expect it ; and you may expect it. But hath he a right to expect nothing in return ; no regard to his character, no attention to his instructions, no compliance with his exhortations, no concurrence with his prayers ? Hath the great God a right to expect nothing in behalf of his servant ? Think, sirs, of what I am going to say to you.

You desired this person for your minister ; you took the proper measures for obtaining him ; you persevered in them with a commendable spirit. You succeeded in your attempts. The great God hath now given you what you sought. Should you not be thankful to him ? I hope you are thankful. Take

care then to shew it. I will tell you how. Improve well the blessing you have received. If you should not, the great God would then be angry with you. Perhaps he would take this blessing away. Certainly he would punish you. Would he not have just cause? Pray consider.

WHEN you manure, plow, sow, and harrow your grounds, for what end is it? That you may reap the fruit of them, no doubt. This you do naturally and assuredly expect. If after all your care, and labour, and expence, and hopes, you should in fact reap no fruits from them, would you not be grievously disappointed and dissatisfied? No question, you would. Christians, the chief husbandman, Jehovah himself, hath planted a vineyard among you. He hath sent forth one to labour in it, whom you have known, whom you have lived with from his very infancy; of whose good behaviour you have been constant witnesses; with whose ministerial abilities you are entirely satisfied; of whose particular regard for you, you have doubtless had many proofs; one in short, who is your own free, unanimous, and affectionate choice. May not the Lord say concerning you, as he said concerning his antient people; ‘what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?’ And may not I say, as the prophet said on that occasion; ‘the Lord looks that you should bring forth grapes’.—Ah miserable vineyard, should he have cause to challenge thee, as that of old; ‘wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it

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‘ forth nothing but wild grapes ;’ producing only forgetfulness of God, ignorance, unbelief, lying, cursing, swearing, breach of sabbath, injustice, intemperance, selfishness, covetousness, envy, revenge ! Read and tremble at the awful threatening denounced in the like case, Is. v. 5. 6. ‘ And now go to : I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard : I will take away the hedge thereof ; and it shall be eaten up ; and break down the wall thereof ; and it shall be trodden down. And I will lay it waste : it shall not be pruned nor digged ; but there shall come up briers and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it’. — Oh terrible words ! Oh dreadful calamitys ! May you of this congregation never know the meaning of one by feeling the weight of the other !

To conclude with my best advice to you : love and honour your minister : listen to his doctrines : pray for his success : receive his counsels with pleasure : submit to his rebukes with meekness : reverence your Creatour, your Saviour, your bible, and your conscience : remember all these require you to be good ; that your minister was sent to call you to be good ; and that if after all you should not be good, he must witness against you, and they will condemn you. ‘ But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.’ I shall say no more, but that I heartily wish your minister and you much comfort together in this world, and a joyful meeting

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in the next, where you may live happy in God; and
in each other for ever more. Amen.

THE END.



